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Progress in preparatory activities for the World Summit on Sustainable Development

Report of the Secretary-General*

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 55/199, entitled "Ten-year review of progress achieved in the implementation of the outcome of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development", the General Assembly decided to organize the ten-year review at the summit level, calling it the World Summit on Sustainable Development. The Summit will take place in Johannesburg, South Africa, from 2 to 11 September 2002. By the same resolution, the Assembly emphasized the importance of early and effective preparations for the Summit and laid out guidelines for the preparatory process. Moreover, the Assembly invited the Secretary-General to submit for its consideration at its fifty-sixth session a progress report on the state of preparations. The present report, in response to that invitation, is based on information available as of 31 August 2001.

2. By resolution 55/199, the Assembly also decided that the meetings of the tenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development should be transformed into an open-ended Preparatory Committee to provide for broad participation. Subsequently, the Commission acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development held its organizational session in New York from 30 April to 2 May 2001. The Preparatory Committee carried out an initial review of progress in the preparatory activities at the local, national, subregional, regional and international levels, as well as by major groups, and adopted several decisions relating to future preparatory work. The present report should therefore be read in conjunction with the report of the Preparatory Committee (A/56/19).

3. Also of close relevance to the present report is the report of the Secretary-General on progress in preparatory activities submitted to the Preparatory Committee at its organizational session (E/CN.17/2001/PC/23). The report describes, among other matters, national, regional and international preparatory processes and provides information on documentation, public outreach and involvement of major groups. Read together, the three reports provide an overview of the preparatory activities undertaken so far at the national, regional and international levels.

* Submission of the present report was postponed to 31 August 2001 in order to provide up-to-date information on the preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, including the outcomes of regional round table consultations and other national and regional input.

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II. Progress in preparatory activities

4. The decision taken by the General Assembly to convene the World Summit on Sustainable Development has met with strong support by stakeholders across the world. There has emerged a consensus that the Summit is taking place at a crucial juncture and will be a turning point in moving the global society to a sustainable future. The tempo of preparatory activities in recent months has accelerated, with many more events being planned or envisaged by stakeholders at various levels.

National preparations

5. Preparatory work at the national level has been progressing on several fronts, involving the establishment of national preparatory committees, national consultations with stakeholders and preparation of national assessments. The Secretariat has also invited countries to launch four initiatives to help raise awareness, mobilize support and enhance the sense of ownership of the preparatory process. These initiatives are: (a) 101 ways to promote sustainable development; (b) sustainable development visions for the twenty-first century; (c) children's Agenda 21 posters; and (d) national progression targets. The report of the Secretary-General referred to in paragraph 3 above provides a succinct account on possible ways to implement these initiatives expeditiously. Recent national reports indicate that, in an increasing number of countries, efforts are under way to promote their implementation.

6. By 31 August 2001, over 40 Member States had notified the Secretariat of the establishment of a National Preparatory Committee or similar mechanism to coordinate national preparations for the Summit. The national committees are expected to undertake national assessments, raise awareness, and mobilize support at the local and national levels. A list of these national committees with relevant information, including contact information, has been placed on the Secretariat web site dedicated to the Summit (http://www.johannesburgsummit.org) and is being updated as information becomes available.

7. National consultations with stakeholders and the preparation of national assessments are important avenues for carrying out a comprehensive and balanced appraisal of the implementation of Agenda 21 and for identifying accomplishments and constraints and addressing future challenges. While most national assessments are still under way, the Secretariat has so far received assessment reports from 11 countries. A number of the reports prepared by national councils for sustainable development have been recognized by their Governments as the official national assessment reports and have been made available to the Secretariat. While the structure and length of these reports vary, they all contain information on policy measures that have been adopted since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and on the specific challenges and constraints countries face. The Secretariat has posted these and other relevant reports on its Summit web site and will continue doing so as new reports become available. The Secretariat has also been informed that some 90 more national assessments have been completed lately, many with the support of the Capacity 21 Unit of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

8. To facilitate the work of the Preparatory Committee, the Secretariat is in the process of preparing and updating country profiles based on national reports submitted to the Commission on Sustainable Development since 1993. The profiles provide an overview of the implementation of Agenda 21 at the country level on an issue-by-issue basis. So far, over 120 drafts of national profiles have been completed and are being reviewed and updated by Governments. The completed country profiles will be made available on the Secretariat web site on national information (http://www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/), as well as to the Preparatory Committee at its meeting in January 2002.

9. Participation by local communities and representatives of civil society in national consultations and national assessments is essential to a bottom-up and effective participatory preparatory process. A number of Governments have actively encouraged such involvement and have organized meetings and public forum discussions to facilitate exchanges of views and stakeholder dialogues. The Government of Mongolia, for example, held a series of conferences for young people to discuss sustainable development issues. The National Commission on Sustainable Development of Thailand is organizing multi-stakeholder consultations to prepare the national sustainable development programme. Finland is promoting national discussion on sustainable development in different seminars as

well as through the media. It is also participating in the implementation of the initiatives of 101 ways to promote sustainable development and children's Agenda 21 posters. As part of the domestic consultation process, Australia has also scheduled a series of consultation forums for stakeholders in major cities from August to September 2001. These meetings are open to all interested stakeholders and members of the public.

10. Major groups have also taken an active role in national preparations. The Forum for Environment for Ethiopia has launched a series of activities designed to encourage participation by non-governmental organizations and civil society in the national preparatory process. The Armenian Association for Sustainable Human Development has initiated action to implement 101 ways to promote sustainable development and children's Agenda 21 posters initiatives. The United Nations Association-Canada has started a "Youth agenda 2002" project to support active and substantive youth participation in the national review by creating a national youth network around social, cultural, economic and environmental issues in Canada. In the United States, the Citizens Network for Sustainable Development has been actively involved in citizen initiatives and preparatory activities. The network is also moving forward by creating a U.S. Citizens Preparatory Committee to ensure active participation from United States citizens in the preparatory process.

11. Major groups involved in Local Agenda 21 activities have also undertaken their own assessments. For instance, the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives, in cooperation with the International Union of Local Authorities, the Secretariat and UNDP, has launched an international survey to assess the impact of Local Agenda 21 activities and identify tangible outcomes of such initiatives. A report based on the results of the survey will be available in January 2002.[1]

Regional and subregional preparations

12. Regional and subregional preparatory processes have been moving forward along three tracks — regional and subregional intergovernmental preparatory meetings, regional round tables and stakeholder consultations. As of 31 August 2001, all five eminent persons' regional round tables have taken place; all four subregional preparatory meetings for Latin America and the Caribbean as well as one for Asia and the Pacific have been organized, with more scheduled for September and October. Regional intergovernmental preparatory meetings will be held from September to November and will receive input from regional round tables, subregional meetings and stakeholder consultations. A complete list of subregional and regional intergovernmental preparatory meetings is annexed to the present report.

13. The stakeholder consultations are organized in a time-frame allowing them to feed into other national and regional preparatory events and activities, including intergovernmental meetings. For instance, the Jakarta Regional Forum, "Business Opportunities and Sustainable Development Partnership Strategies", was scheduled from 3 to 5 September 2001, back to back with the meeting of the Bureau of the Preparatory Committee. The report of the Forum will be submitted to the regional intergovernmental meeting and will be available for consideration at global thematic round tables. A calendar of meetings and events involving stakeholder consultations can be accessed on the major groups' web page of the Secretariat web site devoted to the Summit.

14. While subregional preparatory meetings focused on problems specific to countries in the subregion, a number of common issues have emerged from the meetings. For example, at the Southern Cone Preparatory Meeting (Santiago, 14-15 June 2001) and the Caribbean Subregional Preparatory Meeting (Havana, 28-29 June 2001) strong concern was expressed over the challenges to sustainable development posed by globalization. At the Regional Assessment Conference for Central and Eastern European countries (Bucharest, 27-28 June 2001), as well as at the Southern Cone and Caribbean regional preparatory meetings, finance for sustainable development was identified as a key issue to the success of sustainable development policy.

15. Other relevant regional and subregional meetings have also yielded interesting information on regional trends as well as important policy findings. For instance, in a regional message for the Summit adopted at a ministerial conference in Kitakyushu City, Japan, last September, ministers from Asian and Pacific region countries pointed out that the Asia and the Pacific region could be characterized by degradation superlatives. These include: (i) the largest land area

affected by soil degradation and human-induced salinization; (ii) the largest contribution of total sediment transport into the oceans; (iii) the highest level of water withdrawals for agriculture; and (iv) the largest population of the world's poor (E/ESCAP/SO/MCED(00)/1, annex II). Ministers emphasized in the message that the problem of poverty and illiteracy has greatly hampered sustainable development in the region and poverty reduction is thus the key to achieving sustainable development.

16. The Arctic Council, an intergovernmental forum composed of all Arctic countries, with Arctic indigenous people participating in its work on a permanent basis, met in Rovaniemi, Finland, on 11 June 2001 and adopted an initial Arctic Message for the Summit. The message highlighted, among other things, the challenge of securing sustainability in the use of natural resources in the Arctic region. It emphasized that all Arctic States should assess the environmental, social and economic impacts of any undertaking to exploit resources in the Arctic portion of their territory, taking into account the latest research on the specific circumstances of the Arctic.

17. The five eminent persons' regional round tables, organized by the Secretariat in collaboration with host Governments, also reached important conclusions. In the round table for Europe and North America (Vail, United States, 6-8 June 2001), organized in collaboration with the Denver-based Center for Resource Management, participants recognized that this region uses an unfair amount of the world's resources and has a special responsibility for eradicating global poverty. They expressed a profound sense of urgency in regard to global trends and agreed that the present generation may be among the last that can correct the current course of unsustainable development before it reaches a point of no return. They proposed, among other actions, that a public awareness campaign be launched to change unsustainable consumption patterns.

18. At the round table for Latin America and the Caribbean (Barbados, 18-20 June 2001), participants identified as overriding issues the region's high levels of poverty and income inequality and recognized the serious pressures facing the region's biodiversity. They also highlighted the need for robust and sustained economic growth; political and institutional reforms to strengthen democracy and freedom; greater political commitment by Governments and stronger administrative infrastructure to implement public policies for sustainable development; and technical and financial assistance to support national strategies for sustainable development. Among the concrete proposals from this round table was the establishment of a "Village of Hope" in Johannesburg, similar to the one set up at the 1994 Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, in Barbados, where best practices could be displayed and disseminated.

19. At the African round table (Cairo, 25-27 June 2001), participants underscored the serious challenges facing Africa and devoted considerable attention to the challenge of globalization. It was recognized that, overall, Africa has not benefited from globalization and that Africa must take steps through increasing scientific capacity, better education and better governance to become part of the globalization trend. The round table also considered the following priority areas: food and agriculture; energy; technology; regional integration; transport and infrastructure; peace and stability; finance; and institutions. Participants recommend that the regional preparatory meeting select from the report of the round table a set of priority issues and develop them for endorsement at the Summit in Johannesburg.

20. At the round table for Asia and the Pacific (Kuala Lumpur, 9-11 July 2001), participants noted that the huge diversity of the region poses particular challenges for achieving sustainable development and that the 1997 financial crisis has diminished the capacity of many countries in the region to address these challenges. While the Rio Earth Summit created a greater awareness in the region of the need for sustainable development, progress is not readily discernible and natural resource depletion and environmental degradation have generally worsened. Among the priority areas identified for the region are the impacts of globalization; capacity-building and the need for a dialogue on science for sustainable development; poverty reduction; finance for sustainable development; technology transfer; public participation and governance; food security; population and migration; and the proliferation of small arms. Various proposals for regional cooperation were presented, including proposals for the establishment of a regional council for sustainable development and the organization of a regional symposium on science for sustainable development.

21. At the round table for Central Asia (Bishkek, 30 July-2 August 2001), participants noted that the region encompasses the two most populous countries in the world. They also highlighted the considerable political changes in the Central Asian countries, the sometimes harsh physical conditions and certain intraregional conflicts, all of which pose the overriding challenge of how to move towards sustainable development in practice. The problems of the land-locked countries of the region and of drug trafficking in and through the region were stressed. Participants agreed that a key issue is to find a development path that is consistent with the cultural values of the region. Among the priority areas identified for consideration were new approaches to development; better governance; stronger institutions; participation and information for sustainable development; and sustainable development and use of natural resources. Participants proposed that the Summit agree on a process that would lead to a global scheme for restructuring foreign debt.

22. The reports of the round table consultations will be submitted to the respective regional and subregional preparatory committee meetings. To this end, the five regional economic commissions have been asked to translate the round table reports into the relevant languages and to submit the reports to the regional preparatory committee meetings as official United Nations documents. The regional economic commissions have also been asked to provide time for the round table chairpersons to present the results of the round tables to the preparatory committee meetings.

International preparations

23. Preparations at the international level are progressing mainly within the United Nations framework, through intergovernmental preparatory meetings and events and activities coordinated by the Secretariat. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and the European Commission have also organized meetings addressing the preparations for the Summit.

24. At its organizational session, the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the Summit reviewed progress in preparatory activities at various levels and adopted decisions on specific modalities of its future sessions and arrangements for accreditation and participation of relevant non-governmental organizations and other major groups. The Preparatory Committee also recommended a draft resolution for adoption by the General Assembly on the provisional rules of procedure of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

25. Recognizing the importance of fully considering the reports of all relevant intergovernmental processes, the Preparatory Committee invited the United Nations Resident Coordinators to facilitate support from the United Nations system to country-level preparations. It urged bilateral and multilateral donors to support preparatory activities in developing countries and countries with economies in transition as a matter of priority.

26. Organizations of the United Nations system have actively engaged in preparatory activities at all levels. The United Nations Environment Programme, UNDP, the regional commissions and other international and regional organizations have been active partners in preparing for the regional and subregional meetings. They have also provided support to stakeholder consultations and contributed to other meetings or events relevant to the Summit.

27. In addition, the Secretariat is exploring possibilities for holding global thematic round tables that will focus on issues of a global nature. Currently, efforts are under way to finalize the themes, dates and venues of the global round tables. Information updates will be uploaded onto the Secretariat web site on the Summit when available. The recommendations from the global round tables will be transmitted to the meetings of the Preparatory Committee.

III. Participation by major groups

28. Effective contributions from and active participation by major groups and civil society are essential to a transparent, dynamic and interactive preparatory process. In its resolution on progress in the preparatory activities at the local, national, subregional, regional and international levels, as well as by major groups (resolution 2001/PC/1), the Preparatory Committee encouraged further preparatory initiatives by major groups, in particular those that result in new partnerships and commitments to sustainable development. The Preparatory Committee also adopted a decision on the arrangements for the

accreditation and participation of non-governmental organizations and other major groups in the preparatory process and in the World Summit (decision 2001/PC/3). Efforts are already under way to prepare for the multi-stakeholder dialogue segments at the second and third sessions of the Preparatory Committee.

29. In the report of the Secretary-General referred to in paragraph 3 above, an account of the major groups' international initiatives is given in section IX, showing the broad range of their activities and their deep commitment. Most of these initiatives are either ongoing or will take place in the coming months. Recently, the Secretariat has started to list on its Summit web site the major groups' initiatives, providing links to them and forming an easily navigable network of major groups' web sites, showing them in action in preparation for the Summit. The list will be updated regularly so as to keep all interested stakeholders informed.

Notes

[1] See E/CN.17/2001/PC/23 for a more detailed account of the survey.

Annex

List of regional and subregional intergovernmental preparatory meetings (as of 31 August 2001)

Regional and subregional preparatory committee meetings	*Venue*	*Dates (2001)*
Africa		
Regional preparatory committee	Nairobi	6-9 November
Southern Africa	Port Louis	17-19 September
Northern Africa	Tunis	5-7 September
Eastern Africa	Nairobi	10-12 September
Central Africa	Libreville	17-19 September
Western Africa	Abuja	1-3 October
Asia and the Pacific		
Regional preparatory committee	Phnom Penh	27-29 November
North-East Asia	Beijing	26-28 July
South-East Asia	Manila	17-19 October
Central Asia*	Almaty	19-21 September
Southern Asia	Colombo	27-29 September
Pacific region	Apia	5-7 September
West Asia		
Regional preparatory committee	Cairo	24-25 October
Latin America and the Caribbean		
Regional preparatory committee	Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	23-24 October
Southern Cone	Santiago, Chile	14-15 June
Caribbean region	Havana	28-29 June
Andean region	Quito	2-3 July
Meso-America	San Salvador	17-18 July
Europe		
Regional preparatory committee	Geneva, Switzerland	24-25 September
Central-Eastern Europe	Bucharest	27-28 June

* This subregional preparatory committee includes representatives from countries in both the Asian and European regions.